



DODGE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Dale J Schmidt Sheriff **Scott Mittelstadt** Chief Deputy

May Sheriff's Column

As we move into summer, one of the busiest travel times of the year, it is important to remember the importance of being a defensive driver. Many people get in the car and think about where they are going, the music they are listening to, or conversations with the people in their car. That is ok, except while doing that you need to remember to always be on the lookout for what other drivers are doing.

I recall from my driver's education class that I should always be scanning the road, intersections and ditches that are in front of me. I was instructed to watch about 12 seconds in front of my car. How do you time 12 seconds in front of you? Pick a stationary object like a street sign or a power pole and time how long it takes you to get to that spot. You will then have an idea of how far 12 seconds is in front of you. Remember, that distance will change depending on how fast you are driving and will be much greater when you are traveling at higher speeds. Also, remember that it takes a much greater distance to come to a stop at higher speeds.

So what does scanning in front of you mean? You should be watching for pedestrians, vehicles approaching intersections, animals such as deer or dogs walking near the road or other obstructions that could potentially pull in front of you. As you are scanning from side to side and seeing these potential obstructions, it should prepare you to be ready to react or slow down ahead of time. As we know, action always beats reaction, but if you are already anticipating a problem you can react much quicker and likely avoid a collision.

So how else can we be defensive? When you are approaching an intersection, watch traffic approaching stop signs and anticipate that they may not stop. Adjust your speed to compensate. When on a divided highway make sure you are in the right lane as often as possible. Not only is it illegal to remain in the left lane when traffic is approaching from the rear, but have you ever thought about wrong way drivers? Most times when we see collisions from wrong way drivers, the collision happens in the left lane. The reason for that is that wrong way drivers think they are in the right lane of a 2-lane highway and therefore if you are in the left lane of a 4-lane highway, the risk of that collision with a wrong way driver is much greater.

Additionally, when you are at a stop sign, remember to take a look around the blind spots or obstructions that are created by the pillars of our cars or the people within them. Many intersection related crashes could be prevented by simply taking a second longer to ensure that another car is not in your blind spot.

Always remember to be a defensive driver. You are never able to control the actions of others on the road, but you are always able to control your own actions while being prepared to react to the actions of others. Being a defensive and safe driver will help to ensure we all make it home safely at the end of every day as we work together to make Dodge County a great place to live, work and visit.

Dodge County Sheriff Dale Schmidt